DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 305 102 JC 890 132

AUTHOR Wilkinson, Tom
TITLE Empowering Employees for a New Century.
PUB DATE 89
NOTE 11p.; Paper prepared for the Annual Convention of the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges (69th, Washington, DC, March 29-April 1, 1989).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Community Colleges; Decision Making Skills; Employee Attitudes; Employees; Employer Employee Relationship; *Learning Resources Centers; *Participative Decision Making; Problem Solving; *Staff Development; Two Year Colleges
IDENTIFIERS *New River Community College VA

ABSTRACT

In January 1986, the Learning Resource Center (LRC) of New River Community College in Virginia initiated efforts to increase the level, quality, responsiveness, and adaptability of LRC services. Central to these efforts was an emphasis on employee involvement and empowerment intended to create an atmosphere of trust and teamwork; enhance employee problem-solving and decision-making capabilities; better use employee skills; improve communication between employees and among departments; develop leadership; improve job satisfaction; increase employee knowledge levels; and improve the level and quality of products and services. Employee involvement and empowerment was promoted through: (1) exercises in self-awareness; (2) problem-solving training; (3) the initiation of a quality circle; (4) the use of a special project team to solve problems related to collection development, library automation, and staffing; (5) presentations to top administrators; (6) the development of a five-year plan for the LRC; (7) weekly staff meetings; and (8) a yearly evaluation retreat. The success of the program is reflected as front-line employees increasingly make decisions, consciously question methods, and seek better solutions to problems. Employees recently indicated a high sense of job satisfaction, and the level and quality of products and services have improved. A 15-point outline describing the college's empowerment process is included. (AJL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED305102

EMPOWERING EMPLOYEES FOR A NEW CENTURY

Tom Wilkinson
New River Community College

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

T. Wilkinson

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Paper Prepared for the 1989 American Association of Community and Junior Colleges in Washington D.C.

JC 890 132

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In January 1986 the Learning Resource Center of New River Community College initiated efforts to focus on customer service by increasing the level, quality, responsiveness, and adaptability of LRC services. Central to these efforts is an emphasis on employee involvement and empowerment. A climate has been established and is continuing to evolve that is intended to:

- create an atmosphere of trust and teamwork
- enhance employee problem solving and decision making capabilities
- better use the unique skills and talents of employees
- improve communication between employees and among departments
- develop leadership capabilities
- improve job satisfaction
- increase employee knowledge levels
- improve the level and quality of products and services

Employee involvement and empowerment efforts have become an ongoing process that includes a variety of activities, techniques, and practices. These include employee self-awareness exercises; problem solving training; initiation of a quality circle; staff development; special project team utilization to solve critical issues; presentations to top administration; development of an LRC vision, a five-year plan, and yearly goals and objectives; weekly staff meetings; and a yearly retreat to evaluate the program.

The employee empowerment program is successfully accomplishing its objectives. Front-line employees are making decisions, consciously questioning methods, and seeking better solutions to problems. Employees are recognizing and using latent talents. Communication is more open, and leaders are emerging. Employees recently indicated a high sense of job satisfaction, and the level and quality of products and services have improved.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

Tom Wilkinson
Director of Learning Resources
New River Community College
P.O. Drawer 1127
Dublin, Virginia 24084

DESCRIPTION OF COLLEGE AND PROGRAM

New River Community College is a comprehensive two-year institution of higher learning operating under the Virginia Community College System of 23 colleges. New River Community College is located in Southwestern Virginia and serves over 155,000 citizens of the New River Valley who reside in the counties of Floyd, Giles, Montgomery, Pulaski, and the City of Radford. The college had a fall 1988 enrollment of 3,600 students and slightly more than 1,850 full-time equivalent students. The average age of the student body is 28 years.

New River Community College believes that all people should have a chance to develop and extend their skills and knowledge and to increase awareness of their roles and duties as citizens. The college serves the educational needs of the public and assumes a duty to help provide the requirements for trained workers in the region through a combined effort with local industry, business, professions, and government. The college is also concerned about organizing programs with local senior institutions as well as with those of local public school systems.

New River Community College offers programs two years beyond the high school level. These programs include:

- Occupational/Technical Education
- University Parallel/College Transfer Education
- General Education
- Continuing Education
- Special Training Programs
- Developmental Courses
- Special Regional and Community Services

The Learning Resource Center (LRC) is an essential component in the educational efforts of New River Community College. The LRC is both a provider of information and a center for communication and learning. The LRC provides quality resources and services to meet the educational and informational needs of the college and the New River Valley. Users of the LRC include students, faculty, staff and the public. Services of the LRC include the operation of the college library, independent learning services, audiovisual services, faculty development services, distance education services including teleconferencing.

FOUNDATION OF EFFORT

In January 1986 efforts were initiated in the Learning Resource Center of New River Community College to focus on customer service by increasing the level, quality, responsiveness, and adaptability of LRC services. These efforts are necessary if the LRC is to meet the changing needs of the college's students, faculty, staff, and the community. Central to these efforts is a theme of employee involvement and empowerment. Employees are urged to participate in the problem solving and decision making process, to take ownership of their jobs, and to reach their potential as contributing members of a team.

The common thread in the employee involvement and empowerment efforts is a firm belief that people make a difference. The human resources of the LRC are considered the organization's most valuable assets and the only ones which appreciate in value. When people are empowered to use their human potential, improvement in the performance of the organization can occur. Based on this belief, a climate was established and is continuing to evolve that is intended to:

- create an atmosphere of trust and teamwork
- enhance the problem solving and decision making capabilities of employees
- better use the unique skills and talents of employees
- improve communication between employees and among departments
- push decision making down to the lowest possible level
- improve job satisfaction
- increase employee knowledge levels
- improve the level and quality of products and services

DESCRIPTION OF EFFORTS

The process of involving and empowering employees of the Learning Resource Center is ongoing and composed of a variety of activities. The activities described below present an overview of the major efforts used to make New River Community College's Learning Resource Center a responsive and adaptive organization which has substantially improved the level and quality of its services and products.

ESTABLISHING A VISION

A major step in creating a new sense of service and quality in the LRC was to re-examine the center's purpose and to establish a vision of what employees wanted the LRC to be. Discussions on the purpose and mission of the college and the LRC were held during weekly staff meetings as a means to stimulate thinking on the potential of the LRC. Center managers focused on medium-and long-range needs of the college and opportunities for the LRC. Meetings and activities stressing the importance of quality service and customer satisfaction were held reaffirming the LRC's service orientation. Finally, two half-day mission and visioning sessions involving all LRC employees were held to discuss the purpose and responsibilities of the LRC and to establish a common employee-based vision of what the LRC should be. These sessions resulted in a mission statement and the following LRC vision:

The Learning Resource Center of New River Community College will be recognized nationally as a model for community college learning resource programs in providing quality resources and services.

INVOLVING PEOPLE

The involvement of all employees in as much of the planning and decision making process and in as many LRC activities as possible has been the primary thrust of effort. The goal of employee involvement and participation is to establish an organization of thinking employees where teamwork is the norm.

In addition to the enhanced problem solving and decision making skills obtained by LRC employees, employee involvement has also generated a greater understanding by employees of each other's roles and responsibilities. This has increased employees' knowledge and understanding of the total LRC operation, and has provided for a more caring and concerned organization.

Specific employee involvement and empowerment activities include the introduction of a quality circle and the establishment of special project teams.

Circonference Quality Circle: The Circonference Quality Circle was established in February 1986. After a period of training in problem identification, selection, analysis, solution, and implementation, the Circonference selected its first project--"to improve the level of LRC evening services." Twenty-five causes of why LRC evening services were not as effective as day services were identified. Solutions were suggested, selected, and implemented, and today the current evening operation is rated as much more effective.

While all the Circonference projects have proved very beneficial, two require further mention. The LRC possessed an outdated and often-repaired photocopier, which drew $4,600 per year in maintenance and supplies from the LRC budget. The Circonference analyzed the problem and suggested a solution. With the support of the College's President and Cabinet and the College Board of Trustees, the Circonference implemented a system where copier revenue is returned to the LRC and is used to purchase necessary materials and equipment. To date, the system has allowed the LRC to purchase two new photocopiers for student use, software and a microcomputer for the LRC library automation system, and all necessary supplies and maintenance costs. In addition, the $4,600 previously spent for supplies stays in the LRC budget and is used for more critical needs.

Faced with a shortage of personnel available to provide an increasing number of services, the Circonference initiated a comprehensive program to more effectively obtain, train, and retain college work/study students. This program resulted in a savings of almost $42,000 and a national award from the National Association of College and University Business Officers (NACUBO) and the USX Foundation. Of equal importance was the transfer of involvement and empowerment from LRC staff members to student assistants.

The Circonference Quality Circle has shared it efforts with other college organizations, with deans within the Virginia Community College System, and has made a presentation at the 1987 Virginia Community College Association state conference.

Project Teams: In addition to the Circonference Quality Circle, the LRC has also established special project teams to place concentrated effort on solving critical problems. Because the LRC is functionally aligned into three specialized units--Audiovisual Services, Library Services, and Independent Learning Services-- care is taken to insure that each unit is represented on a project team, regardless of the problem area. Each project team addresses a specific problem, over a specific time, and makes specific recommendations for solving that problem.

The **Redwood Project** identified and prioritized the LRC library collection needs, identified strategies for acquiring funding to meet the identified needs, and developed a plan of action to carry out their strategies. Recommendations from the Redwood Project have resulted in a 5-year plan to improve the collection plus over $110,000 in funding raised through private sources.

The **Cypress Project** developed a master plan to automate operations of the LRC via microcomputers. As funding becomes available, components of the plan are added. The LRC recently converted to a computerized circulation system of its library holdings based on the Cypress recommendations.

The **Oak Project** identified staffing needs and recommended options and priorities for adding staff to the LRC. These options include the use of student workers, university interns, volunteers, and part-time employees. Several of these recommendations have been used. In addition, the Oak Project recommended an employee rotation system which became part of the LRC employee development program.

STRUCTURING FOR EFFECTIVENESS

To become more effective, it was important that the LRC's structure reflect its opportunities as well as its responsibilities. The LRC's three units were encouraged to expand their services and operations, but not as three totally separate lines of business. Each unit took ownership of its particular services and worked to enhance the level and quality of those services; however, each unit sought to complement the other units, making for a united and comprehensive organization. As a result, productivity in all three units increased.

Weekly LRC management team meetings are held to communicate information and resolve conflict. In addition, weekly LRC staff meetings with all employees are held for open communication and status reports. To obtain feedback from users, the LRC requested the establishment of a standing committee of college faculty, staff, and students. This Learning Resources Committee provides the LRC with valuable feedback on LRC services.

PLANNING FOR SUCCESS

Once the LRC vision and mission were identified, LRC employees developed a 5-year plan of action. This plan reflects the college's master plan and mission and is based on the LRC mission statement with eyes toward the LRC vision. Each year the total LRC staff participates in a day-long retreat to review the accomplishments of the action plan of the past year and to establish an action plan for the coming year. The yearly action plan reflects the college goals for the year and serves as a basis for additional planning and decision making by LRC employees. The plan takes into account the LRC's critical needs and requirements to provide its services. Quarterly evaluations of the plan insure that the LRC is focused on achieving its desired results. An evaluation of the plan of action at the end of the year provides the LRC with measurable data as to how well its goals and objectives are being met.

INSTILLING PRIDE

It is important to the success of the LRC's efforts that employees believe their work has meaning and purpose and that it is something in which they can take pride. The LRC produced its own brochure as an identity piece and produces a college-wide periodical dedicated to the teaching/learning process. The LRC also looks for success, rewards it, and enjoys it. Within the past two years, the LRC has received three national awards, two for video production, and one for cost-reduction activities. In addition, the LRC continually receives letters of thanks and appreciation from clients. These letters are shared with all employees.

RESULTS

The employee involvement and empowerment program is successfully accomplishing its objectives. Recent employee feedback from the August 1988 retreat indicated a real sense of trust and teamwork among center employees and departments. Front-line employees are making decisions, consciously questioning methods, and seeking better solutions to problems. Phrases such as "we can't do that" and "it can't be done" are being replaced by "why not?" Employees are recognizing latent talents and putting them to use, communication is more open, and leaders are emerging. Employees recently indicated a high sense of job satisfaction, and the level and quality of products and services have improved.

Specific results achieved since the implementation of the employee involvement and empowerment efforts include:

- improved evening services
- an improved security system
- a collection development plan which resulted in an asset growth from $15,665 in 1986 to more than $81,000 in 1988
- over $110,000 in private funding to support library collection development
- 36% increase in circulation
- 27% increase in the number of clients served
- initiation of an independent learning program resulting in 229 students completing course work during first year of program
- 242% increase in enrollment of independent learning students from first year to second year of program
- initiation of a college teleconference service resulting in 375 individuals being served during the program's first year
- a self-sufficient copier system
- a training program for work-study students resulting in an annual savings of almost $42,000
- a plan for and initial implementation of LRC automation
- a staffing analysis and planning model
- three national awards for video production
- one of two community colleges nationwide to receive a national NACUBO cost reduction award in 1988
- a presentation at a state conference by the LRC quality circle
- finalist for 1989 United States Senate Productivity Award for Virginia

Employee involvement and empowerment efforts will continue to be nurtured. As new employees enter the LRC, they will become part of the process. Hopefully, as employees leave the LRC, they will carry the seed for employee empowerment with them. The process itself will continually be examined, tuned, and adjusted to maintain a flexible, adaptive, and responsive organization designed to meet the changing needs of community college education.

APPLICABILITY OF PROGRAM

The Employee Involvement and Empowerment Program of New River Community College is applicable to other organizations regardless of the nature of the business, because the program is based on the belief that people do make a difference. The benefits are many:

Employee Benefits

- Increased employee knowledge
- Increased belonging to the organization
- Increased ownership in the job
- Improved quality of work-life
- Better use of unique skills and talents
- More control over job
- Growth towards potential
- More satisfied employees

Organization Benefits

- Improved communication
- Increased trust and teamwork
- Enhanced problem solving and decision making
- Improved quality of work
- Improved productivity
- Improved flexibility
- Identify leadership capabilities
- More effective organization

Customer Benefits

- Better products
- Better service

The program is a three-way win situation for the employee, the organization and the customer.

THE NEW RIVER COMMUNITY COLLEGE EMPOWERING PROCESS

New River Community College's process of empowering employees is a basic 15 point plan. This plan can be used by an organization to enhance its level of quality and productivity.

1. **Commit to empowering people**
2. **Envision your purpose**
3. **Become aware of and acknowledge self and others**
4. **Teach the value of participation**
5. **Involve people**
6. **Encourage job ownership**
7. **Remove "It can't be done" and "They won't let us" from the organization's vocabulary**
8. **Initiate self-managing change teams**
9. **Plan for success**
10. **Listen, listen, listen**
11. **Train and retrain**
12. **Simplify structure, reduce bureaucracy and eliminate destructive conditions**
13. **Select the right people**
14. **Look for success, reward it and enjoy it**
15. **Take readings, nurture the process and don't stop**

ERIC Clearinghouse for Junior Colleges MAY 12 1989